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ABSTRACT

This paper recommends the creation of a position of research coordinator by expanding the role of faculty liaison within colleges and universities to help bring services generally provided by special libraries to academic researchers. Reasons given for academic institutions to create such a position include the practicability of applying new information technologies and tools to research methods, and the importance of making the library an active center of research activity. Possible functions of the position are enumerated, including familiarity with online and technological developments; online searching; and public relations activities, such as communication with and personal assistance to faculty to describe services available, locations, best strategies applicable, and contact persons for various library services. Possible problems resulting from an unclear definition of the position are discussed, and qualities required by the best candidates for the position are described. (Author/THC)

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THE FACULTY LIAISON AS RESEARCH COORDINATOR- A GROWING NEED FOR THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY

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Abstract- A proposal for a position of research coordinator by expanding the role of faculty liaison is outlined for colleges and universities. Reasons for more academic institutions creating the position are given such as the practicability of applying new informational technologies and making the library an active center of research activity. Possible functions of the new position are enumerated, many of which are neglected by some libraries or not organized into an efficient unit. Qualities of the best candidates are described.

In times of budget cuts it may seem like wishful thinking to propose a new position for a substantial portion of colleges and universities, but strong reasons may be put forward to develop faculty liaison/research coordinator functions in many organizations.

It has seemed to many librarians that special libraries provide services that all researchers would benefit from and academic researchers envy: personal interviews with library specialists on special topics, selective dissemination of information reports with automatic updates, swift document delivery and other expensive services. Faculty members, although having taken research methods courses in their respective fields, could still benefit appreciably by receiving the above services, especially if they could be modified to be less costly. Methods have changed greatly over the years and keep changing at a fast pace as new technical developments are brought into wider use and new tools are constantly advertised. It takes an expertly trained person with time to devote to learning the implications of these new tools to do the best research. While faculty use major tools in their respective fields and may keep up with developments in a particular subject through contacts with colleagues, most would agree that they could benefit by additional expert advice.

New developments have brought many services available only in special libraries to researchers in academic institutions in some form. The creation of a research coordinator position would be an important part in bringing these services to the academic setting in

the most productive way. Online searches are an important part of these developments. Now members of the academic community in many colleges and universities can have searches performed on a variety of data bases including all sorts of indexes, abstracts and reference sources and have these searches updated continually. Data base searching is becoming a specialty in itself as more bibliographic tools, some not existing in paper form, are made accessible to computer searchers. Searching on some bases is quite complicated (special codes, etc.); subject expertise is often required on many and other specialized knowledge is required for efficient use. Online developments as well as other types (e.g. OCLC reference uses) need to be communicated to other faculty, and personal assistance is needed to describe just what services are available, the locations, and the best strategies applicable. Unfortunately, it seems that a small portion of college faculty take advantage of these services if offered because many are not sure what is available or their value.

Public relations between librarians and other parts of the academic community would be improved by the creation of a liaison/research coordinator position. A librarian as a colleague who would be available to advise other facutly on how to expand search strategies would be appreciated. College and research administrators would also be appreciative of research assistance on administrative topics. A good working relationship between librarians and other campus faculty and administrators could result in a give and take exchange where new developments or tools were brought to the attention of those who would benefit on a specific topic

by a librarian without a request being initiated. The library could become a more active information resource center in the thick of all campus issues. Campus research might be increased. Public relations would be improved by liaison work as the liaison/research coordinator would inform other faculty and administrators of whom to contact for various library services. Often information or service is lost or delayed because the wrong person is contacted, messages are not delivered, or contacts are not initiated with the library at all. (I have often met other faculty informally or on a serials matter and passed on information about library services or advice on research topics because they did not know how to go about requesting service or even that such services were available.)

Now that the usefulness and practicability of the new position has been described, a more definite outline of the position might be helpful.

As research coordinator, a librarian would:

1. Keep in touch with new research methods.
2. Be an expert on online searching.
3. Know subject specialists to consult to perform the best searches in areas needing special expertise.
4. Know all of the related services offered in the local area.
5. Know national developments and trends in research and acquisitions of materials as regional union lists and copyright restrictions.
6. Work with all other librarians, making sure to exchange information on new developments and to route mail or ads on recent tools.
7. Give advice to the college faculty and administrators on how to research special topics both for research publications and administrative functions.

8. Advise student assistants working for faculty members on library procedures and services.
9. Explain how material not in the library would be available to the researcher. (Faculty not knowing the latest tools and technology sometimes think they must travel to a large research library.)

Creating the research coordinator position (and not only for large academic libraries) would strengthen the liaison position, also defined by Laurence Miller,[1] if this function is already performed in the library in some way. As liaison, the librarian would:

1. Promote library services.
2. Keep up with the curriculum, faculty activities, administrative restructuring, and the direction of research on campus.
3. Develop good relations between other faculty and administrators with librarians on the basis of library services offered.
4. Promote contact between librarians and other faculty. (The liaison would not limit communication between other librarians in reference, acquisitions, interlibrary loan, subject bibliographers but would introduce the person in need with the best resource person when needed.)
5. Cummunicate changes the library makes in services or procedures, distribute new service request forms, etc.

Problems will arise until confusion about the position is cleared. The functions should be made known from the start and changes communicated as developed. Since one or two people cannot be the personal researchers for several hundred other faculty and administrators, knowing when to say "no" will be difficult. Without staff, the librarian can only be an advisor at certain times. Impartiality as one comes to know colleages personally will be necessary to maintain. Extending services to graduate students[2] on their own research will also be

dependent on time devoted to the research coordinator position. The function would depend on who actually performs the computer seaches. Defining the extent of services since the term "advisor" is open to interpretation would be a necessity, this should be in writing. Would the librarian search union lists personally or update computer searches automatically? Also, fitting the position in with the rest of the library would take much thought, good will and work. Deciding who will perform searches, and how the liaison/coordinator will work with the reference department are important points to work out carefully. My experience as a data seacher has convinced me that new technologies must be extended to the college community and a librarian with time to spend on this work is necessary. It would be important for the person in the new position to keep performing searches and using OCLC, etc., to keep up-to-date and in practice. This person would be the one chosen to give campus demonstrations and class teaching when necessary because of the level of expertise.

The best feature of the new position is that it could be designed to fit each library since it has not solidified into routine. In almost every library certain functions are neglected or some communication is lacking in public services. The weakness of each institution could be corrected as the position is designed. Librarians perform many of these functions

in many institutions. Formalizing the position and exchanging experiences would be valuable to academic librarianship. Centralizing the work might actually be a more efficient way of handling operations already performed by many librarians with varying degrees of quality.

The person chosen for the position would have to be talented and possess a myraid of skills. One should be an excellent researcher, communicator, innovator, scholar, diplomat and sensitive professional with patience and joy in helping people on an individual level.

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